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14 June 1945  
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TO : CO, SCI, Germany

SUBJECT: The RSHA and the Death of Count CIANO

(Source: Interrogation of Frau Hildegard BEETZ)

OPS-

INFO

1. On 10 Sept 1943 Subject, an interpreter in Amt VI B 1, was sent to Oberallmannshausen (near Munich) to serve as interpreter for Count Galeazzo CIANO, the former Italian Foreign Minister. CIANO was then living in the country home of Prince Sayn-Wittgenstein, under a form of house arrest. His children were with him, as was his wife, Edda Mussolini.

2. Dr. Höttl, chief of Amt VI B 1, had given Subject the mission of gaining CIANO's confidence and obtaining his views on political affairs before, during and after the fall of Mussolini.

3. Subject was well-chosen for the operation. She had served in Rome with Dr. Herbert Kappler, the Police Attache, and had become Kappler's deputy for Amt VI affairs throughout the six months immediately preceding the Badoglio coup. Her husband, Major (then Captain) Gerhard BEETZ, was an acquaintance of the Cianos. He was living with her in the neighborhood for two of the five weeks during which Frau BEETZ worked as the Cianos' interpreter at Oberallmannshausen.

4. On 16 Oct 1943 Ciano heard he was to be taken to Italy. On the 19th he left for Verona. At the time of his departure Ciano did not know whether he was being taken to prison, or whether Mussolini had done something to bring about his release. By sending a book back to Frau BEETZ -- a pre-arranged signal -- he notified her that he was in prison.

5. Frau BEETZ claims that she never became Ciano's mistress but that by this time she had taken a strong liking for him and was working to save his life. This was, in any case, the policy of her chief, Dr. Höttl, and -- she believes -- the policy of Kaltenbrunner. These two wanted Ciano kept alive at least long enough to disclose the whereabouts of his diaries and private papers, and of the Italian Foreign Office records. With these papers one section of the RSHA hoped to unseat Ribbentrop and put a candidate of their own -- Schellenberg was mentioned -- into his place.

6. Ribbentrop, on the other hand, wanted Ciano executed as soon as possible. To achieve this, he worked through Rahn (German ambassador to the Italian puppet government) who had a strong influence over WOLFF, the Hochste SS und Pol. Führer in northern Italy. It was Wolff who arranged for Ciano to be taken to Italy: the first news that Dr. Höttl had of his imprisonment was

-1-

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brought to him by Frau BEETZ when she returned to Berlin on October 23rd.

7. Höttl now gave Frau BEETZ a more specific mission. She was sent to Verona on Nov 3rd with instructions to make contact with Ciano in prison and to find out from him where he had hidden his papers. Subject reported to Gen. Harster, BdS for northern Italy, and visited Ciano in prison for the first time on Nov 6th.

8. For four weeks Subject saw Ciano during the afternoon and evening of almost every day. During this period she made a total of eight reports to Berlin. On Nov 12th Subject visited Edda Mussolini, who was staying in Ramiola as 'Countess Santos,' being installed in a sanatorium there in company with an Italian Air Force lieutenant named Emilio Pucci.

9. Edda Mussolini was permitted only one visit to Ciano in prison, and that under close supervision. The only persons allowed to see Ciano alone were Frau BEETZ and an Italian police officer: these two never visited him together.

10. On Dec 4th Subject visited Berlin to discuss with Höttl the possibility of a deal whereby Ciano would be given his life in exchange for his papers. At Höttl's suggestion she drafted a letter to Kaltenbrunner on Dec 6th, outlining the possibility of using Ciano's papers to expose Ribbentrop's shortcomings. No agreement was reached on a deal at this time.

11. On Dec 9th Subject arrived back in Verona and resumed her daily visits to Ciano. She sent reports regularly to Berlin; and from Berlin on Dec 26th came two telegrams saying that if Ciano's trial could not be postponed Kaltenbrunner, Harster and Höttl would arrange for him to escape from prison.

12. Matters now developed quickly. On January 2, 1944 Subject went to Innsbruck for a conference with Kaltenbrunner, Harster and Höttl. The proposed deal with Ciano was now written down. Kaltenbrunner apparently did not put his name to the deal itself, but wrote Ciano a covering letter saying that he would stand by his word if Ciano did likewise.

13. The deal was as follows: First step, Ciano to tell where the Foreign Office records were in Rome. Second step, Ciano to be sprung from jail and taken to Switzerland with Edda, the children+, and Frau BEETZ. Third step, Ciano to give Frau BEETZ his diaries in Switzerland.

-2-

+ the children were in fact already in Switzerland, having been smuggled there by Edda: and Subject knew this

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Fourth step, Ciano to be given Swiss francs (amount not known by Subject) to enable him to live in exile in Switzerland. Two Waffen SS men from the Hague went back to Verona with Frau BEETZ and Harster. They were to disguise themselves as Italian partisans and break into the jail as and when needed.

14. Frau BEETZ says that she knew at this time that Ciano's diaries were in Edda Mussolini's possession in Italy: she allowed the agreement to stipulate Switzerland so that Ciano should have an opportunity to reach safety. Subject also claims that when Edda appeared in Verona with the diaries (see below) she did not have her searched or followed -- but instead urged her to take off at once for Switzerland with the diaries.

15. On Jan 3rd -- the day after the Innsbruck meeting -- Subject went to Ramiola to tell Edda of the agreement and obtained her approval of it. On Jan 4th, with directions furnished by Ciano, Subject went to Rome and located the eight volumes of Foreign Office records: they had been built into a wall, over a doorway.

16. Returning the next day, Subject was informed by Gen. Harster that Hitler had not yet approved Ciano's release and that it would not take place on Jan 6th as had been arranged. Previously Kaltenbrunner had said he would engineer the release on his own responsibility. In a report to Kaltenbrunner on the recovery of the documents, Subject therefore included a statement (which she terms a protest) to the effect that she would be upset if Ciano were not released. Her letter on this occasion is still available.

17. On Jan 7th Edda Mussolini appeared in Verona, one day later than expected on account of an auto breakdown. Subject told her of the hitch in Ciano's release and urged her to leave for Switzerland with the diaries (which were concealed around Edda's waist). Edda returned to Ramiola and set out with Lt. Pucci for the border. Subject believes that Edda crossed into Switzerland the night of Jan 7th or 8th.

18. On Jan 8th, the Italian authorities began Ciano's trial. It was concluded on Jan 10th with a sentence of death. Meanwhile Lt. Pucci had returned, after leaving Edda at the Swiss border, with letters from Edda to Hitler and Mussolini, urging them to intervene in order to save Ciano's life.

19. No pardon was forthcoming, however. Frau BEETZ stayed with Ciano in his cell from 2:30 on the afternoon of the 10th until the execution the next morning. In her diary she describes this as the "most terrible night of my life."

20. Ciano gave Subject his watch, his fountain pen and a woman's solitaire ring that he carried sewn in his coat as a talisman. He took poison that had been given to him by Edda, but the poison failed to work. At 9:00 he was executed by being shot in the back of the neck.

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-4-

21. The only response Subject received to her 'protest' to Kaltenbrunner was a bouquet of roses. Kaltenbrunner also arranged for her to spend a four-week leave with her husband from April 7th to May 4th; and on June 8th he notified her that a reward of 10,000 marks had been paid to her credit at her Berlin bank.

22. Subject's connection with the case did not cease with Ciano's death. In a subsequent operation (see separate memorandum) she went to Switzerland in an endeavor to contact Edla; and produced for Amt VI some important Italian Foreign Office records that had been hidden in Ramiola.

*L. E. de Neufville*  
L. E. de Neufville  
Civ SCI

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